

WSDOT Bicycle and Pedestrian Documentation Project: Project Overview

**Prepared for:
Participating agencies**

Prepared by:



WSDOT Bicycle and Pedestrian Documentation Project Overview

2017

Cascade Bicycle Club

The Washington Department of Transportation (WSDOT) Bicycle and Pedestrian Documentation Project is a statewide effort sponsored by WSDOT, conducted in conjunction with the National Bicycle and Pedestrian Documentation Project. The work element is the development of a statewide bicyclist and pedestrian count database to establish benchmarks and track changes consistent with objectives identified in WSDOT's Strategic Plan and the State Bicycle Facilities and Pedestrian Walkways Plan.

The study will rely primarily on volunteers to count pedestrians and cyclists traveling in bicycle lanes, on streets, on trails and paths, and on sidewalks across the state. An outreach effort, conducted by Cascade Bicycle Club is an important part of this project and will ensure that volunteers have all the necessary information to collect a consistent set of statewide bicycle and pedestrian counts.

This document was produced by **Cascade Bicycle Club**. Any questions can be directed to KelliR@cascadebicycleclub.org

Introduction

This document provides background information regarding the Washington State Bicycle and Pedestrian Documentation Project.

1. Count Dates and Times

Dates

Late September to early October is the accepted annual national bicycle and pedestrian count period. This year, the 2017 Washington State Bicycle and Pedestrian Documentation Project dates will be in late September (September 26-28) to coincide with universities being back in session. To reduce the chance that data is skewed by weather, sports events, or other outside factors, local participants may select a **single date** from the three days provided: **September 26, 27 or 28.**

Rationale for Dates

The WSDOT Count Period in early fall was selected because it represents a peak period for walking and bicycling, both work and school-related. Weather conditions are generally conducive, schools are back in session, and people have returned from vacations and are back at work.

Times

Designated time periods are identified below. The designated time periods represent the busiest periods for bicycling.

DESIGNATED TIMES:

- Weekday, 7-9 AM
- Weekday, 4-6 PM

Rationale for Time Periods

Weekday PM peak periods were chosen since the afternoon peak typically has the largest volume of travelers, with commuters, school children and people running errands. Weekday AM peak periods were chosen since the work commute period coincides with the school commute period. Counts conducted during these periods will provide an excellent snapshot of bicycling and walking during the peak periods of the year. Actual local peak periods may vary considerably.

Weather

Weather may be a determinant in selecting one of the three proposed dates to conduct counts, but a participant should not be worried if the weather is poor or unusual during the count period. Weather conditions will be recorded for each count on the Count Form and be considered as a factor in future analysis. Over time, future counts, permanent counters and surveys will average out and overall trends in activity will become apparent.

2. Counts

Count Variables

The proposed counts are intended to identify the numbers of bicyclists and pedestrians passing a specific point:

- on a sidewalk (both sides of street)
- path (both directions of travel)
- on-street bikeway (both directions of travel).

A person who passes by a point more than once is counted **each time** they pass by the point.

Count Method

The Washington Count Period will be conducted manually, by volunteer counters.

To ensure that data received from different participants is comparable and consistent; participants should agree to follow the instructions and guidelines identified below.

STEP 1: OBTAIN MATERIALS

Count forms and the Background Data Sheet are available from Cascade Bicycle Club, VPA@cascadebicycleclub.org or from WSDOT's website: <http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/bike/Count.htm>

Materials can be reproduced freely. The documents provided are:

- Documentation Project Instructions (This document)
- Volunteer Instructions and Count Form
- Background Data Sheet and Instructions

STEP 2: SELECT GENERAL COUNT LOCATIONS

To identify count locations in each participating jurisdictions, WSDOT and Cascade Bicycle Club work with local representatives from each jurisdiction to identify meaningful locations. The following considerations and suggested criteria are provided to local jurisdictions to help in the selection of general count locations:

- bicycle and pedestrian activity areas or corridors (downtown, near school campuses, parks, large workplaces, etc.)
- representative locations in urban, suburban, and rural locations
- key corridors that can be used to gauge the impacts of future improvements
- locations where counts have been conducted historically
- locations where bicycle and pedestrian collision numbers are high
- locations where there are on-going counts being conducted by other agencies through a variety of means, including video taping
- gaps and pinch points for bicyclists and pedestrians (potential improvement areas)

STEP 3: SELECT SPECIFIC COUNT LOCATIONS

Once general locations have been selected, the Local Count Coordinator should inspect the sites to determine exactly where counters can be positioned.

Guidelines for this inspection trip include:

- For multi-use paths and parks, locations near the major access points are best.
- For on-street bikeways, count both sides of the street. Locations where there are few if any alternative parallel routes are best.
- For traditional downtown areas, a mid-block location near the center of the downtown is best. Count bicycles and pedestrians in one direction of travel only.
- For large-scale employee campuses, either on the main access roadway or near off-street multi-use paths is best. Count everyone in both directions at one access point.
- For residential areas, locations near higher density developments or near parks and schools are the best. Count everyone in both directions at one access point, typically a sidewalk and street.

For all locations:

- Counters will need to be in a safe, visible location and should be on public property in a location that does not block pedestrians or bicyclists.
- You must receive written permission from property owners if you will be on private property.
- If at all possible locate the counters in an area that will be comfortable for them (shade on hot days, shelter from wind/rain/etc during inclement weather)

Rationale for Locations

The recommended locations are based on where many bicyclists and pedestrians travel, either now or after infrastructure improvements have been made. The purpose of the counts is to understand peak bicycle and pedestrian activity on a typical day; while it may be useful to conduct a few counts where bicyclists and pedestrians are not expected, it is preferable to understand existing use. We do not recommend counting bicycle movements through intersections because (a) it can become extremely complicated for one counter and (2) turning movement data is of little value for this database.

STEP 4: COMPLETE THE BACKGROUND SHEET

This sheet will provide valuable information on the setting and conditions in which the counts take place. Researchers will be able to cross-tabulate things such as usage with land use, density, weather, income, and facility type.

Use the 'Background Data Sheet', available from Cascade Bicycle Club (VPA@cascadebicycleclub.org) to record characteristics of the count locations.

STEP 5: OBTAIN COUNTERS

Each location should require one counter. Ideally, two counters will be provided per location, especially at busy intersections. You will want to identify and secure a counter for each location

plus one backup counter for every 5 locations. Counters for this study will be comprised of a body of volunteers.

STEP 6: TRAIN COUNTERS

Counters will need to be familiar with how to complete forms and interpret field conditions.

The Day of the Count

STEP 7: COUNTER EQUIPMENT

Counters should be provided with data sheet(s) and written instructions. Volunteers will be instructed to provide their own water, writing utensils, writing surface, and to dress appropriately for weather.

STEP 8: COUNT FORMS

Distribute count forms to counters. Count forms can be reproduced from the documents provided to you by Cascade Bicycle Club (VPA@cascadebicycleclub.org).

STEP 9: TRANSPORTING AND MANAGING COUNTERS

Counters will need to arrive at the count locations at least 15 minutes ahead of schedule. The Local Count Coordinator should visit each count location to ensure that counters are on schedule. If the count locations are numerous or dispersed, designated supervisors may be needed to visit locations.

STEP 10: QUALITY CONTROL

The Count Coordinator and any location supervisors should conduct a random review of counters during the count period to ensure they are on-duty and tabulating information correctly. Count results that vary significantly from one time period to the next or that are unusually consistent may need to be explained sufficiently to the Count Coordinator's satisfaction, or discarded.

STEP 11: COLLECTING FORMS

All forms should be collected by the Count Coordinator at the conclusion of the count period. The Count Coordinator should double-check to ensure that the count forms have been completed accurately.

STEP 12: SUBMITTING DATA

All volunteers must enter their data online at

<https://bikepedcount.wsdot.wa.gov/EnterData>

Completed count forms should be returned by volunteers within 10 days of the counts by mail, email or fax.

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Washington State Bicycle and Pedestrian Documentation Project

The Washington State Documentation Project collects bicycle and pedestrian usage data in cities throughout the State. It is similar to the [National Documentation Project](#) and occurs annually in the early fall.

Each year WSDOT and the Cascade Bicycle Club enlist the support of volunteers and other organizations, like Feet First and Washington Bikes, to benchmark the numbers of people bicycling and walking on trails, bike lanes, sidewalks, and other facilities across the state. **The 2017 count will take place on September 26-28, 2017.**

Sign-up to Volunteer!

[Bicycle and Ped Count Portal](#)

2017 Counts

- **I want to volunteer!**
- [Project Overview](#) (pdf 355 kb)
- [Volunteer Instructions & Count Form](#) (pdf 343 kb)
- [Background Data Sheet](#) (pdf 300 kb)
- I want to enter data

Past Report

- [2015 Summary Results Table](#) (pdf 265 kb)

Webinar: Update on Washington's Bike and Walk Data Network: How Permanent Counters & Annual Counts Work Together

June 22, 2017, 10:00-11:30 am

Presentations from the webinar are now [available](#). (pdf 8 mb)

Washington State is increasingly a leader in bike and walk count data collection. This webinar will explore what counts are taking place and how jurisdictions are using the information to assess, build, and understand active transportation networks in Washington State. Panelists include: Kelli Refer, Cascade Bicycle Club; Amanda Mansfield, Spokane Regional Transportation Council; Kim Brown, City of Bellingham; Ed Spilker, WSDOT; Julie Jackson, WSDOT.

Counts have been conducted all over Washington State, but focused on several cities in 2016 including:

Anacortes	Kent	Redmond
Bainbridge Island	Kirkland	Renton
Battle Ground	La Conner	Richland
Bayview	Lake Forest Park	Seattle
Bellevue	Lakewood	Sedro-Woolley
Bellingham	Longview	Shoreline
Bothell	Lyman	Skagit County (unincorporated)
Bremerton	Lynden	Spokane
Burien	Mercer Island	Spokane Valley
Burlington	Milton	Sumner
Concrete	Mount Vernon	Swinomish Indian Tribal Community Reservation
Ellensburg	Mountlake Terrace	Tacoma
Everett	Oak Harbor	Tukwila

Federal Way	Olympia	University Place
Ferndale	Orting	Vancouver
Gig Harbor	Parkland	Vashon Island
Issaquah	Pasco	Walla Walla
Kelso	Pullman	Wenatchee
Kenmore	Puyallup	Yakima

For more information contact:

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What is the purpose of the Count Program?

Transportation planning and design at all levels requires understanding of actual conditions. This involves determination of motor vehicle, bicyclist and pedestrian numbers. This data dealing with the characteristics of vehicle or people movement is obtained by undertaking traffic counts.

Just like motor vehicle counts, counting bicyclists and pedestrians at specific locations helps us to more accurately estimate demand, measure the benefits of investments, and design our projects. The information helps us target safety and mobility projects and improve our traffic models.

How do we collect the counts?

The documentation project uses a data collection protocol similar to and consistent with the National Bicycle and Pedestrian Documentation Project. We work with a network of city staff, bicycle club members, and other volunteers to collect counts and document them using this consistent process.

Are the counts collected by volunteers valid?

Yes. This documentation project uses a very traditional method involving placing observers at specific locations to record bicycle or pedestrian movements. Observers use tally sheets to record numbers consistently. In addition, city and state staff conduct a quality control effort to cross check many of these count locations.

Collecting manual traffic counts in this manner can often be superior to using mechanical counters or sensors and is much less expensive. In addition to their expense, mechanical sensors only cover limited areas of the traveled way frequently missing counts. They are easily displaced and damaged which can lead to inaccurate readings. Manual traffic counts are often required even when mechanical counters are used to ensure accuracy.